Castlemaine Naturalist

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Swift Parrot Survey 2/8/03

A general lack of blossom and the large number of Red Wattlebirds present at some of the sights may well have influenced the number of birds recorded at the annual Swift Parrot Survey this year.

The most memorable sightings for the day were Crescent Honeyeaters at the Newstead Motel and in Pound Lane we were treated with a lovely view of a pair of Musk Lorikeets slipping in and out of their hollow in the morning sunlight. Off the Mia Mia track we saw a pair of Brown Falcons quite close to the road in a dead tree and at the Quince Tree site we watched a flock of White-browed Babblers doing their usual antics. But no Swift parrots!

Birds recorded were:

Crescent Honeyeater
New Holland Honeyeater
White-naped Honeyeater
Sulphur-crested Cockatoo
Musk Lorikeet
Fuscous Honeyeater
Australian Shellduck
Crimson Rosella
Red-rumped Parrot
Spotted Pardalote
Common Bronzewing
Brown Treecreeper
White-browed Babbler
Eastern Spinebill
Weebill
Yellow-faced Honeyeater
Striated Pardalote
Brown-headed Honeyeater
Red Wattlebird
Blue wren
White-plumed Honeyeater
Galah
Eastern Shrike-tit
Eastern Rosella
Long-billed Corella
Magpie
Red-browed Firetail
Willy Wagtail
Grey Shrike-thrush
Yellow Robin
Grey Currawong
Australasian Grebe
Brown Falcon

PS: Two Swift Parrots were sighted at the corner of Pullens Road and Sandy Creek Road on the Sunday.

Vale Stan Bruton

Members were saddened to learn of the sudden death of Stan Bruton in the Northern Territory on the 31st of July 2003. Stan joined the CFNC in 1977 only a few months after the club started. He had noticed a poster in a shop window and came along on an excursion where he recalled being made very welcome and being impressed by "a bloke who obviously knew about gum trees". He felt very much at home in the club and was secretary for a short while, with help from his wife Audrey.

Stan grew up in Taradale and on the edge of the Wombat Forest at Little Hampton. He had a lifelong interest in identifying things but his main interest was birds. As a child he kept a chart of birds marking each month with a dot for a bird and a tick for a nest. During his life he travelled widely and often and at various times was a member of the Tasmanian Field Naturalists Club, the Ringwood Conservation Group and a walking group in Queensland. On CFNC outings it was not unusual to see Stan scrambling up a sapling to see what kind of nest it was "up there", or mimicking calls to get a better look at a bird that was flitting among the leaves too much! Other memories include him peering down a mine while hanging on to a nearby tree to see how deep it was and heading off for some distant landmark because someone had said "I wonder what that is?" – Stan believed in going over and finding out. His eyes would light up as he recalled some incident that had happened while he was bird watching, walking, digging weeds or helping his brother clear blackberries etc. etc. Stan was enthusiastic right to the end.

In 1999 Stan went with the local Field Naturalists who walked the Overland Track from Cradle Mountain to Lake St. Claire in Tasmania. It was a six-day walk and Stan was in his element, often passing others on the track despite the fact that he was in his eightieth year! This year he went on the Field Naturalist's excursion to Newhaven in the Northern Territory, meeting those who went by car at Alice Springs and sharing a four wheel drive vehicle with Chris and Helen Morris. He was quite excited about the trip and had decided not to come straight home but planned instead to continue on to Darwin and Kakadu. Sadly it was south of Darwin, at Litchfield National Park where Stan departed this life when he drowned in a pool at the Florence Falls.

We will miss him and his enthusiasm and zest for life. It is some comfort to know that he was doing something that he really wanted to do, and that he had, without a doubt, had a wonderful time at Newhaven.

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Peregrine Falcons, nesting on a tall building in Brisbane, are being constantly monitored by a camera linked to the web site www.couriermail.com.au/frodo. Calculating from the time the first egg was laid, the chicks are due to hatch during the second week in September. George Broadway

Earthwatch Project – Tracking Echidnas on Kangaroo Island

Between August 2-15, 2003, Nina and John Cole were members of an Earthwatch Team researching the echidnas and goannas at Pelican Lagoon, Kangaroo Island.

Echidna research has not been consistent during European settlement. Major studies were undertaken in 1802 (the taxonomy) and in the 1880's (yes, echidnas are monotremes), but that's about all. The principal investigator, Dr. Peggy Reismiller, assisted by Mike McKelvy, has been studying echidnas for 16 years. And because the Rosenberg Goanna is the native predator of echidnas (as distinct from feral cats and dogs), the goannas are also studied.

This Earthwatch project oversees four research teams each year (eight volunteers per team). Our first three days were spent learning radio telemetry, the vegetation/ habitat types and orientation of the landscape so that the animal movements could be mapped in detail.

From the very first minute we realised that the project was being conducted in a pristine habitat with minimal feral invasion (just a few nettles, olives and the dreaded bridal creeper seedlings).

In normal seasons, August is the time when male echidnas form trains (up to 11 animals) in their quest to find a female mate. Many animals have been fitted with radio transmitters for tracking purposes but echidnas regularly shed their external transmitters as their spines moult or as they move through the undergrowth and surface limestone. So Peggy was hopeful that we would find new animals for her to attach new transmitters to – we had no luck despite over 350 hours in the bush. The goanna life cycle is also being documented and their winter burrows are being monitored. We had more success here. John located a "missing" male goanna that was already part of the study and Nina found a new burrow occupied by a female goanna.

During the two weeks, Acacia paradoxa, Acacia leiophylla, Acacia longifolia sphorae, Correa reflexa, Leucopogen parviflorus and Pimilea macrostegia were all in flower. The Orthrosanthus was well in bud and starting to bloom and moss gardens were flourishing. The Orthrosanthus is the dominant ground cover with no grass species apparent. Mosquito, Spider and Greenhoods Orchids were coming into bloom. We also collected quite a few feeds of morels!

The shallow waters of the Lagoon were home to dolphins and a sea lion, so international volunteers were satisfied with many photo opportunities!

From the Grey Nomads aboard the Kangaroo Island ferry, Nina & John Cole.

History of the Coliban Water Channels – Geoff Russell

Geoff Russell , Public Relations Media Consultant for Coliban Water, provided an enthralling presentation on the history of the Coliban Water System at the August meeting. We were treated to a wonderful slide collection of historical maps, illustrations and photographs of Joseph Brady's amazing Coliban System that was designed to bring water to the goldfields and in particular to the towns of Bendigo and Castlemaine.

Both these towns came into being as a result of the goldrush in 1851 in spite the fact that neither were suitable places for settlement – with no industry, a shortage of labour, and no permanent water supply! Water was the key to the diggings and the Government Camp soon realised the need to establish a reserved waterhole for drinking as most of the water in the barely flowing creeks very quickly became polluted. Historical records show that periods of drought coincided with reduced gold production and increased incidence of dysentery and disease. This is why Bendigo was referred to as the "winter diggings" – goldmining was only viable in the winter months when water was available.

Joseph Brady, working for the Bendigo Water Works Co. in 1858, designed eight reservoirs along the Bendigo Valley – six for goldmining and two for domestic use – to address the water shortage. Only two were built. No.1 was built across the creek at Maple St. in 1859 (the depression can still be seen today) but it leaked and was soon abandoned. No.7 was built in 1861 and included a clever water treatment plant that used sand to filter the water and an underground cistern for clean water storage based on Roman models. (This cistern was rediscovered in 1968 when a worker with a back-hoe accidentally reopened the site – it has since been resealed). Stand pipes that were used as water distribution sites as part of this system, can still be seen today outside the Mazda distributors in High Street, Bendigo and at the Castlemaine Railway Station. The Bendigo Water Works Co. went broke before the other reservoirs could be built. There was insufficient water to process its own holdings in order to find gold to finance the project.

In 1864 Brady won a Victorian Government prize for his design to bring water 64 miles along a channel to Castlemaine and Bendigo from a reservoir at Malmsbury. Water finally flowed along the Coliban Main Channel in November 1877. The whole thing had been a financial disaster costing one million pound to build. Since then two extra reservoirs (Lauriston and Upper Coliban) have been built and the channel system extended to carry water to Kyneton, Maldon, Taradale and Harcourt.

Unlike the Wimmera system, which loses a large percentage of its channel water to evaporation, the Coliban system loses less than 9% along the route. Faced with even more severe water restrictions in early September unless our reservoirs have reached 27% capacity by then (they are presently at 17%), Geoff's talk acted as a stark reminder of the fragility of our water supply and our debt to Brady's amazing system.

PS. Thirteen members ventured out on the Saturday to visit the beautifully crafted brick and granite dissipaters along the Coliban Water Channel at Sedgewick. We were all very impressed by these amazing structures, hidden away in the nearby hills, and agreed that a return trip, to see them in action, would be really interesting! It was a fitting finale to the wonderful talk. Thanks Richard.

Geraldine Harris

Observations

- Spreading Wattle (*Acacia genistifolia)*, Wooly Wattle (*Acacia lanigera)*, Golden Wattle (*Acacia pycnantha*), Rosy Baeckea (*Baeckea ramosissima)*, Common Correa (*Correa reflexa)*, Mountain Grevillea (*Grevillea alpina*), and Bushy Hakea (*Hakea decurrens)* are all in flower at Glenluce. Scented Sundews *Drosera whittackerii ssp aberans* are in profusion. Wax Flowers *Philotheca verrucosa* are in bloom along the Poverty Gully water race section of the Great Dividing Trail above Wheeler Street. Richard Peisse
- Chris Morris has seen a Wedge-tailed Eagle circling overhead.
- Natalie de Marcus has Dwarf Greenhood *Pterostylis nana* flowering in her bush but healthy Grass Trigger Plants *Stylidium graminifolium* in four separate areas appear to be dying back from the leaf tips. Is this due to new growth after rain being burnt by frost?
- Barbara Maund brought along droppings left in a trail in her driveway for identification. They possibly belong to a Sugar Glider or Dusky Antichinus.
- Mars is presently making its closest approach to earth ever and can easily be seen with the naked eye from between 10.30pm.-11pm. at about 30-45degree angle in the east. Athol Dorman
- Long-billed Corellas and Sulphur-crested Cockatoos are present in large flocks in the trees and feeding on the *Onion Grass (**Romulea rosea)* bulbs. Maggie Oliver .
- Yellow-tailed Black Cockatoos have found the Hakea thicket near Singleton's and have been eating the seed and damaging the plants. Bev Singleton
- 19/8/03 Margaret Badminton heard her first Fantailed Cuckoo for this season. Margaret's earliest record of Fantailed Cuckoos at Yapeen in past years has been on the 15th of August.
- Golden Moth Orchids (Diuris chryseopsis) are flowering at Barkers Creek.
- Rita Mills was delighted to see Glossy Ibis on the Edge of the Hay Plain.
- A Yellow-billed Spoonbill has been feeding at Richard's dam.
- Plovers are nesting at the Lesterville Retirement Village, the Kulindi Park Estate, and in the Castlemaine Bacon Co. car park. Richard Piesse
- We have had many visits to our bird bath in Lyttleton Street from the following: Silvereyes, New Holland Honey Eaters, Red Wattlebirds, Spinebills, Crimson Rosellas, European Goldfinches, White-eared Honeyeaters, Thrushes, Sparrows, Magpie Larks and LBBs! I have seen a large flock of Black Cockatoos flying towards Kalimna Park. Trish Addis

- At Melville Caves, John Alexander was surprised to find himself standing under a Powerful Owl in a tree. The owl appeared to watch unperturbed, as he walked below.

Bits and Pieces by T.R. Garnett

The writings in this book are all about birds and first appeared in *The Age*, Melbourne, from 1980 to 1995 as part of Tommy Garnett's column *From the Country*. There are bird studies, book reviews and bird biographies, as well as pieces about birds at home and travelling birds. A bird observer's treat, this book had me pulling down my collection of bird books to make comparisons and look up birds as I read fascinating stories about them!

One piece about Yellow-tailed Black Cockatoos was particularly interesting in the light of all the local sightings that have been reported this year. The description of these "melancholy" birds is very appealing. The observations that they are threatened in Victoria by the diminishing number of large old trees with suitable big high hollows and that they are often seen in winter feeding on the seed of pine trees might partially explain why so many have been sighted around Castlemaine this year. I was also interested to learn that Yellow-tailed Black Cockatoos perform an important ecological function as they excavate wood-boring insect larvae from trees in order to provide protein for their young. His final remark, that it is futile protecting these birds if their habitat continues to be destroyed, reflects Tom Garnett's lifelong passion for birds and his awareness of their important role as indicators of environmental health.

PS. Tom Garnett was secretary of the Royal Australasian Ornithologists Union at a time when they were organising the first Atlas of Australian Birds. This group is now known as Birds Australia and has just won a prestigious prize with the second Atlas of Australian Birds (see article below).

Bits and Pieces is the first in a series of collected works compiled by Penny Garnett. Copies can be obtained from:
Mrs T.R Garnett, 7 McGrath Street, Castlemaine, Victoria, 3450
($21 or $25 with postage) Ph.5472 3142.
Also available at Stoneman's Bookroom, Castlemaine.

Award for Bird Atlas – 12/8/03

This month Birds Australia won one of the Australian Museum Eureka Prizes for Biodiversity Research - for the shortly-to-be-published *New Atlas of Australian Birds*. Seven thousand Atlas volunteers noted bird species and their global positioning system co-ordinates during 20-minute sessions and these four million bird sightings, from the 1998 to 2002 survey, were compared to previous Atlas findings gathered from 1977 to 1981. This comprehensive new study is significant because, "birds are probably the best indicator we've got as to the ecological health of the

environment," said Jim Downey, Chief Executive of Birds Australia. Margaret Badminton undertook the enormous task of coordinating the Atlas volunteers in an area which extended from Gisborne, to North Harcourt and to Kilmore and a number of club members carried out surveys on a regular basis. Those members should feel justly proud of their efforts.

Film -Travelling Birds - DEFINITELY COMING SOON!

From the Business Meeting: 28/8/03

- Those who attended the **Broom Pull** felt satisfied with their morning's effort and it was suggested that further effort should now be made to revegetate the area with suitable native species. Advice will be sought as to the type and availability of sufficient quantities of suitable plants for the area. Many of last year's plantings have not survived and need to be replaced and suitable plants may need to be propagated ready for planting next Spring.
- The "Is it a Native" CD venture has proved to be very successful it was decided to investigate the possibility of **funding an annual prize** to encourage students to get involved with the natural environment.
- Chris Morris expressed an interest in contacting Trust for Nature to investigate the **current situation concerning the Long Swamp** and the possibility of the drain being closed off so that it might be allowed to revert to swamp again. It is some time since the swamp was drained and it would be interesting to know the current land holder's views on the matter.

Extra September Events: (For further info: Phone G Harris on 5474 2244)

- **Wed. 17. Elm Leaf Beetle Info Afternoon**. Chewton Town Hall, 1.30pm.
- **Fri. 19 and Sat. 20. Inglewood Native Flower Show.** 10am.- 4pm.
- **Sat. 20 and Sun. 21. Angair Inc Wildflower Show and Art Show** 10am-5pm
- **Land for Wildlife Open days** (Phone Pam Clunie on 5430 4363)
  Sun. 21– Franklinford. Bird Expert, Dr Jim Radford / Threatened Plant Species. 10am.-2pm. BBQ lunch provided.
  Sun. 28. Dunolly. Woodland birds and revegetation
- **Fri. 26**. NCCMA and Mt Alexander Council **Trivia Night**. Town Hall 6.30pm BYO drinks and nibbles.

Articles Welcome - Articles, reports and observations can be left with Noellene at Tonks Bros., Barkers Street, Castlemaine or sent to P.O.Box 324, Castlemaine, 3450. Articles need to be submitted by the 4th Thursday of the month.
Disclaimer - The opinions expressed in this newsletter are those of the contributors and not necessarily those of the Club.

Castlemaine Field Naturalists Programme - August, 2003.

General meetings are held in the Uniting Church (UCA) hall (enter from Lyttleton St.) at 8.00 pm on the second Friday of each month, except January.
Excursions are usually on the Saturday following the general meeting, and leave promptly at the times stated from The Octopus, opposite Castle Motel, Duke Street. Outdoor excursions are likely to be cancelled in extreme weather conditions. There are NO excursions on total fire ban days.
Business meetings are held at 27 Doveton Street on the 4th Thursday of each month, except December, at 7.30 pm. All members are invited to attend.
NOTE August, September and October '03 business meetings will be at the Eco House in Mostyn Street.
VISITORS ARE WELCOME AT CLUB MEETINGS AND EXCURSIONS

Fri. Sep. 12. ***Sri Lanka's Birds.*** Stuart Dashper, Birds Australia. UCA hall, 8pm.
Sat. Sept. 13. ***Roadside Cleanup***. Meet near Tait's Carriages, Pyrenees Highway, Castlemaine, at 8.30am. Gloves, rubbish bags and red safety vests supplied. Wear sturdy footwear.
Sat. Sep. 13.. ***Tubal Cain Mine and Sailors Gully.*** Leader: R. Piesse. Leave the Octopus at 1.30 sharp.
Wed. Sept. 17. ***Wednesday Evening Wildflower Walk (1)*** Leader: Athol Dorman. All evening walks leave Octopus at 4pm. sharp and return approx 5.30pm.
Wed. Sept 24. ***Evening Walk (2) – Muckleford Reserve*** Leader: Margaret Panter
Wed. Oct. 1. ***Evening Walk (3) - Morgan's Track - off Fryerstown Rd.*** R. Piesse
Wed. Oct. 8. ***Evening Walk (4)*** **– Pipeline Track -** ***Barkers Creek***. Ged Harris
Fri. Oct. 10. ***Wildlife and Biodiversity Issues of Western Victoria.*** Barry Cluston. Farmer and Chairman of Grampians Water. UCA hall, 8pm.
Sat. Oct. 11. ***Mandurang***. Leader, Max Stevens. Leave the Octopus at 1.30 pm .
Fri. 10 – Sun. 12.Oct. ***Spring Campout '03 – Cape Bridgewater*** (ref. Aug. CN#302)
Wed. Oct. 15. ***Evening Walk (5) - Taradale***. Leader: Penny Garnett
Fri. Nov. 14. ***Natural History, Outback***. Trevor Blake. UCA hall, 8pm.
Sat. Nov. 15. ***Bendigo Sewerage Ponds.*** Leader: Chris Morris.
Sat. Dec. 6. ***Bird Challenge.*** Leaders: Ken and Maureen Dredge.
Fri. Dec. 12. ***Members and Visitors Night.*** UCA hall. 8.30pm

2003 Committee - C. Morris (President) ph. 9885 4221, J.Turnbull (VP and Grievance Officer) ph. 5474 3035, G. Broadway (Secretary) ph. 5472 2513, H. van Gemert (Treasurer) ph. 5472 1082, E. Perkins, R Mills (Newsletter Ed & Public Officer), G. Harris, (Ass't Newsletter Editor), B. Maund, M. Oliver, R. Piesse and J. Cole.

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